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## "THEY DESPISED THE PLEASANT LAND."

Psalm 106, v. 24.

BY MRS. LYDIA H. SIGOURNEY.

The discoverers of America were cheered by the sight of fresh leaves, and fragments of trees, borne towards them by the Gulf stream, and by the flight of birds who seemed to bring the welcome of the shore.

THE adventurous vessel, whose sails unfurled  
To pierce the shroud of this Western World,  
Rejoiced as it neared the unknown shore,  
At the floating flowers that the billows bore:  
Even thus we hail on this sea of time,  
Branches and wreaths from an unseen clime,  
Fragrance that flows from a glorious strand,—  
Despise not the breath of the Pleasant Land.

Birds of bright plumage, and tuneful note,  
Hovering met the Explorer's boat,  
With greetings sweet, and a truthful test  
That their perils were o'er, and their labors blest:  
So, breaks on the soul, as its haven draws near,  
The welcome of angels, in melody clear.  
Oh! list to the song of the white-wing'd band,  
Despise not the voice of the Pleasant Land.

## THE

## LIFE AND WORKS OF GOETHE.\*

THIS new life of Goethe inaugurates a new method in the composition of biographies, by subordinating the subjective laws of the biographer to those of the individual of whom he writes. Mr. Lewes rightly regards the individual organism as a thing of growth, modified, but not fundamentally changed, by the medium in which the growth is effected. To mark off the successive stages in the growth of this organism, and to describe the characteristics, to which they give rise become, therefore, the duty alone of the biographer. Connected therewith, however, are the relations which these bear to the general economy of the family, society, and the past and future condition of humanity. For genius itself, though visibly operating in the present, draws its succulence from the past, and projects its flowers into the future.

Governed by this method, Mr. Lewes could not fail to do justice to Goethe—to give him that elevated position in the scale of greatness to which his natural and acquired abilities so justly entitled him. Those who are invincibly doomed to judge of others by the little shifting standards within themselves—who gather up and crucify everything by the heterogeneous specialities that lie huddled up in their moth-eaten brains—will find much to add to, or take from, the merits of Mr. Lewes as the biographer of Goethe. For our own part, we look upon the work as the most successful attempt we have seen, to write out philosophically the life of an individual, as it hangs together by the laws of its own nature, and not according to the arbitrary and artificial judgments of men, or the fluctuating conventionalities of literary composition or rhetorical exigencies. Man's nature, as it reflects itself—as it pushes outwardly its own internal workings, is not at all so mysterious, as when disconnectedly drawn through the mystic brains of conceited

writers, more bent on their own canonization than on painting the life-history of the subject of their discourse.

Let no man seek to unravel the life of another through the distorted medium of the abortive canons of extinct theories, but let him become the true historian of the revelations of its own growth—of its stem, bud, blossom, and flowering—and then Biography becomes the living reflection of the realities of life, as well as their justification, whether they have mechanical regularity or original flights.

In this direction has Mr. Lewes labored, and, in doing so, has succeeded in weaving together the golden threads of Goethe's life, just as the laws of his being ruled that they should be woven—as multitudinous in their diversities, as sublime in their unity. Disregarding the perilous celerity of conception and production, so popular of late in literary as well as other labors, Mr. Lewes devoted ten long years to the study of his hero—looking at him through books and private letters—through manuscripts and the garrulity of the living; and above all, in taking down the whole psychological structure of the man as he detected it, so beautifully interwoven with, and drawn out in his own immortal productions. And yet the sciolist may fail to discover the fruits of his long literary parturition in the two volumes before us—so chastely simple is real art in its manifestations—so supremely modest in its spiritual outline.

In opening out the first chapter of Goethe's life, Mr. Lewes dwells but too briefly on the moral, intellectual, and physical relationship of children to parents, wherein the former may be blessed or cursed through the qualities inherited from the latter. *This law of transmission*—should it ever be fully evolved out of the laboring loins of humanity—must lead to a mental revolution in the judgments of men; must equalize disparities in the framework of society, which now as frequently drown the just in sorrowing humiliation, as they elevate the unworthy to sinful points of ostentatious display and supercilious pride. Charity must be born of organic moral elevation and knowledge, and not from the theoretically-twisted doctrines of a popular *Credo*.

Genitally considered, Goethe would seem in a measure to have been rather baptized than immersed in the flesh—having drawn vigor of body and mental balance from his father;—a happy disposition and the rudimentary forms of a winged imagination from his mother;—a butterfly love of women and a collateral taste for the aesthetics in dress from his ancestors. What an embryological preparation and capital for a long and happy life—broad-set sails, with all but plethoric winds—needing no orthodox blessing to spin it out to the harmonious tenuity of an evening shadow—its two poles having vigorous root in heaven and earth.

Fortune, therefore, smiled on the first dawns of Goethe's existence, giving him neither poverty nor riches, neither too many nor too few friends—leaving its current to flow gently on, without those outward and internal perturbations and struggles which so frequently darken the destinies of men—shaking the foundations of their nature, and drawing a curtain of

gloom over the landscape of their lives. An artist by nature as by circumstance, his great productions were drawn serenely from out the evenly-poised machinery of his life—reflecting, in quiet though beautiful colors, the pulsations of a well-regulated soul, itself the arsenal of inexhaustible treasures. What a happy area into which to have his genius cast! Born of plenty and adopted by refined and indulgent royalty, it could well reflect the warring elements of knowledge, like a calm lake the mellow beams from a tropical moonlight. There is, consequently, more amplitude of thought than of wounded and bruised feeling in his writings, more of sunshine than of storm—more of joyous exultation than the wailings of a heart in tribulation. The cup of bitterness was never pressed to his lips—he never inwardly and silently prayed that death might come in the robes of night to blot out blasted hopes, baffled ambition, crushed emotions, and the remorseless fatalities of a purposeless and checkered life.

It is not for us to say what particular bearing the freedom from the world's troubles may have had on the writings of Goethe; their odor is not the less agreeable to us from its not having come from crumpled flowers. Those, however, who refine on nature, have said that the urn of his soul, broken by misfortune, might have yielded sweeter music; its tones have gone deeper into the hearts of others, and in doing so, have opened out fresh fountains in the depths of his own nature. In this connection, we must give an extract from Mr. Lewes, with whose opinion, doubtless, our readers will generally agree:

"There may be some among my readers who will dispute Goethe's claim to greatness. They will admit that he was a great poet, but deny that he was a great man. In denying it they will set forth the qualities which constitute their ideal of greatness, and finding him deficient in some of these qualities, declare his title null. But in awarding him that title, I do not mean to imply that he was an ideal man; I do not present him as the exemplar of all greatness. No man can be such an exemplar. Humanity reveals itself in fragments. One man is the carrier of one kind of excellence, another of another. Achilles wins the victory, and Homer immortalises it: we bestow laurel-crown on both. In virtue of a genius, such as modern times have seen equalled only once or twice, Goethe deserves the epithet of great; unless we believe a great genius can belong to a small mind. Nor is it virtue of genius alone, that he deserves the name. Merck said of him, that what he lived was more beautiful than what he wrote; and his life, amid all its weaknesses, and all its errors, presents a picture of a certain grandeur of soul, which cannot be contemplated unmoved. I shall make no attempt to conceal his faults. Let them be dealt with as harshly as severest justice may dictate, they will not eclipse the central light which shines throughout his life. He was great, if only in large mindedness—a magnanimity which admitted no trace of envy, of pettiness, of ignoble feeling, to stain or distort his thoughts. He was great, if only in his lovingness, sympathy, benevolence. He was great, if only in his gigantic activity. He was great, if only in self-mastery, which subdued rebellious impulses into the

\* The Life of Goethe: by G. H. Lewes. Ticknor & Fields, Boston.